

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 27, 2019

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Chairwoman  
House Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chairwoman  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor/HHS/Education  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor/HHS/Education  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwomen Lowey and DeLauro, and Ranking Members Granger and Cole:

As you know, in February of 2018, the president signed the bipartisan *Family First Prevention Services Act* (PL 115-123) into law as part of the *Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018*. This significant law modernizes the structure of federal child welfare financing to support an upfront investment in strengthening families. The goal is to reduce the number of children being removed from their homes and coming into foster care by funding preventative services for struggling families. As you prepare to work on FY2020 appropriations legislation, we write to request that you designate funds to help states, tribes, and territories implement this new law.

By providing states with matching funds for evidence-based services to address substance abuse, mental health, and other parenting challenges, the *Family First Prevention Services Act* fills a critical need. Currently, states are only able to draw down federal Title IV-E child welfare dollars once a child is removed from the home. Under this new law, we will instead help states stabilize families, keep children safe at home, and lower the demand for foster care placements. With the opioid epidemic bringing more children and families into the foster care system, it is time for innovative thinking that allows dollars and services to move upstream. The *Family First Prevention Services Act* provides the ability for just that.

As the epicenter of the opioid crisis, Ohio continues to see the impact of this epidemic daily in rising caseloads, more children entering foster care, and more families broken apart. The *Family First Prevention Services Act* will provide the state with another tool to fight this epidemic and keep more families intact. It is important that we support a seamless and timely implementation. Ohio's children deserve no less.

We recognize that there will be challenges in successfully implementing this important law. Specifically, in Ohio, fifteen of our counties are operating under a Title IV-E waiver demonstration project, a time limited alternative federal funding structure. Having had the waiver

since 1997, we recognize that these counties may have unique, distinct difficulties implementing the *Family First Prevention Services Act*. Further, with a county-administered child welfare system, Ohio will face various obstacles ensuring our eighty-eight counties can consistently and steadily implement.

We ask that you keep the promise of this new law and challenges of implementation in mind when appropriating funds for fiscal year 2020. By investing in a faster, smoother implementation now, we will see improved outcomes for children and reduced costs in the foster care system sooner.

We appreciate your attention to this request and look forward to working in partnership with you to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families in Ohio and across the nation.


Sincerely,

  
Brad R. Wenstrup

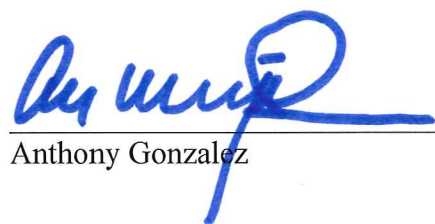
  
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